

从《螺丝在拧紧》中的鬼的形象看亨利·詹姆斯的现实观

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从《螺丝在拧紧》中的鬼的形象看亨利·詹姆斯的现实观

On Henry James’s Opinion of Reality from the Analysis
of the Ghost in *The Turn of the Screw*

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Abstract

The Turn of the Screw is one of the best known and most widely read of Henry James's short fictions. Over a hundred years, it has been heatedly debated by critics of various persuasions since its publication. In this novella, whether the ghost is a real existence or a mere production of the governess's imagination continuously draws critics' attention. This M. A. thesis aims to explore the reason why, as a realist writer, Henry James writes about the ghost which seems to be more popular among the romance.

Firstly, this thesis studies some realistic novelists' opinions of reality at that time and compares Henry James's opinion of reality represented in the novel with these realistic novelists'. This thesis points out the reality represented in this novella is internalized, multi-faceted and difficult to determine, which makes Henry James different from his realistic peers at that time.

Secondly, the romantic elements employed in this novella are identified. As a realistic writer, Henry James adopts and adapts the romance as a form to represent life in his novel. The use of symbolism and imagery contributes to James's producing of the air of reality in characters' psychology.

Thirdly, Henry James insists that novelists be granted the privilege of freedom when creating novels and conducting literary experiments. In order to represent the personal impression of life, Henry James turns his attention to the portrait of characters instead of the development of plot. Just as the ambiguity represented in his characters, the ambiguity in the existence of the ghost reveals James's opinion that the reality is internalized, multi-faceted and difficult to determine. Only by the employment of ambiguity, can he produce in his novel an air of reality which corresponds with the reality in real life.

Key Words: ghost; reality; romantic elements

摘要

《螺丝在拧紧》是亨利·詹姆斯最受读者欢迎的中篇小说之一。在小说出版后的一百多年间，有众多批评家从各种角度对小说内容进行了解读。其中，最引人关注的问题是小说中的鬼到底是个真实存在还是只是家庭女教师想象力的产物。本篇硕士论文将重点探讨这样一个问题：作为一个现实主义小说家，亨利·詹姆斯为什么要在小说中创造一个多数出现在浪漫主义小说中的鬼的形象？

首先，这篇硕士论文探讨了亨利·詹姆斯同时代的现实主义小说家对“现实”的看法，并将他们的看法与詹姆斯的看法进行对比，提出詹姆斯在小说中表现的现实是一种内化的、难以确定且多元化的现实。

其次，詹姆斯继承和发展了浪漫主义，将浪漫主义的表现手法融入到了现实主义小说的创作中。在《螺丝在拧紧》中，詹姆斯也大量运用象征手法来刻画人物的心理现实。

最后，詹姆斯在他的文学理论中提出小说家需要具备在小说中进行实验的自由。为了更好地在作品中展示小说家对现实的独特认识，詹姆斯不像当时多数的现实主义小说家那样，将大量精力运用在情节描写上。詹姆斯的关注重点是人物性格的刻画。正如《螺丝在拧紧》中对人物性格的模糊描写，小说中的鬼是否是真实存在这个问题也没有明确的答案。正是这种模糊描写体现了詹姆斯认为现实是内化的、难以捉摸且多元化这一观点，只有通过含混的手法，才能在小说中创造出一个真实的，包含新现实的世界。因此，小说中的鬼集中体现了詹姆斯对这种现实的看法。

关键词：鬼 现实 浪漫主义元素

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Introduction

The Turn of the Screw is a Gothic ghost story written by Henry James, who is regarded as a “major novelist and critic and as a psychological realist of unsurpassed subtlety” (Baym 1421). In the 19th century, along with William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, Henry James is one of the three most important American advocates of realistic literature (Chang 459-60). He makes a great contribution to the development of realism.

James has many identities, such as the wisest man of his time, realist, naturalist, religious visionary, allegorist...etc. He is a “characteristic American intellectual; but he ‘turned his back’ on America”, which also points out James’s identity as a cosmopolitan (Edel, *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays* 1). Henry James has his unique place in American and world literature because “the expatriation, his closeness to the literary movements of his time, his insight into the way in which the race creates an imaginative whole, and his belief that the imagination knows more than the life of the time can teach it” (Edel, *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays* 5-6). As Henry James’s biographer, Leon Edel speaks very highly of Henry James and his achievements in art.

According to Edel,

If England can boast that in the nineteenth century it had a George Eliot who gave the novel a finer purity of design and made of it a more exalted literary form, if France can boast that with Flaubert the novel attained a great architecture and acquired tools it had never before possessed, America can say that after them came Henry James to set in order the whole House of Fiction. (*Henry James: Selected Fiction* xviii)

From Leon Edel’s point of view, Henry James is a great American writer who contributes a lot to the order in the creation of fiction.

Born in 1843, in New York, to one of the most intellectually remarkable

American families at that time, James had been influenced by his family members, such as his father Henry James Senior, a philosopher and religious visionary, his brother William James, the first great American psychologist, and his sister Alice James, a witty observer of the art and politics of her time and a talented conversationalist.

As an infant, Henry James had been taken to England and Europe and spent two years there before he returned to America with his family. In order to seek a more supple and sensuous education for his children, Henry James's father took the family back to Europe again from 1855 to 1860. During the years, they stayed in England, Switzerland, and France, where they were "endlessly exposed to galleries, libraries, museums, and (of special interest to Henry) theaters" (Baym 1421). Henry James travelled between America and Europe many times during his life, and he decided to settle down in England in his middle age. Although Henry James did not receive systematic formal schooling, he mastered French, which enabled him to communicate with different writers who were active in Paris in that period. He critically absorbed the advantages of those writers and developed his own idea about the art of fiction in his later life.

According to Leon Edel, Henry James's career can be divided into three phases. In the first one, Henry James focused more on the international theme, such as Americans in Europe or Europeans in America. In the second phase, James began to experiment with diverse themes and forms, like dramas and shorter fictions that deal with social and political movements, children's troubled psychology, haunted or obsessed men and women. During the last period, he returned to his international subjects to write criticism and develop his own theory about fiction.

Finished in 1897 and published in 1898, *The Turn of the Screw* had been adapted into various media, including film, opera and ballet. It was first serialized in *Collier's Weekly*. Immediately it was republished in the collection of James's book: *The Two Magics: The Turn of the Screw and The Covering End* in both England and America.

Written in the second phase of Henry James's career, *The Turn of the Screw* is related to the troubled psychology of children and the haunted or obsessed men and

women. This is a frame-story told by an unnamed narrator who listens to his friend Douglas read a manuscript written by a governess. The manuscript says the young governess responds to an advertisement posed by a rich and handsome gentleman. The gentleman raises a strange requirement that the governess should be in full charge of his nephew and niece arranged in Bly and should not appeal, complain nor write to trouble him with anything about the children. In spite of this strange requirement, she accepts the job.

The moment she arrives in Bly, she is impressed by kind Mrs. Grose and angelic Flora. When she is happily expecting Flora's remarkable brother, Miles, coming for holidays, the arrival of the head-master's letter smashes her beautiful imagination about Miles. Miles's dismissal from school makes her suspect that Miles has been corrupted. However, she soon discovers Miles's charm and innocence when she meets him.

One afternoon when the governess is daydreaming about the master in London, she sees an unknown figure emerging at the top of the tower. Several days later she sees again the same figure looking straight into the room to look for someone. She tells Mrs. Grose about the detail and learns that the figure is Peter Quint, the master's dead valet. Not long later, when coming out with Flora, she feels the existence of a woman apparition. This time, she is quite sure that the apparition is the former governess, Miss Jessel, who is already dead too. The governess believes that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel come back to get hold of the children.

From then on, Miles and Flora live under the governess's close scrutiny. Gradually, she comes to believe that the children in fact secretly meet the haunting pair. They are gradually corrupted and contaminated by them; and they are even in alliance with them. However, the governess cannot prove it.

One day, Miles plays the piano to attract the governess's attention in order to help Flora to flee to the lakeside alone. When Mrs. Grose and the governess find Flora in a lakeside clearing, the governess is convinced that Flora has been talking with Miss Jessel. Hence, she boldly asks Flora where Miss Jessel is. Flora immediately denies that she sees Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose also claims that she cannot see Miss Jessel.

Due to this experience, Flora suffers a nervous breakdown. Therefore, the governess demands Mrs. Grose to take Flora to her uncle and leave her alone to save Miles from Quint. The last night, after Miles and the governess finish dinner, the governess makes an attempt to let Miles confess to her. At that moment, Peter Quint appears again. Finally, Miles dies in the governess's arms soon after he speaks out the name of Peter Quint. The apparition has gone. The story ends abruptly.

Just as James states "the strange and sinister is embroidered on the very type of the normal and the easy", *The Turn of the Screw* is a powerful and famous story in which the household, including two young children, is terrorized by the ghosts (Baym 1423). The novella has become "the best known and most widely read of Henry James's short fictions, and has been among the most hotly debated of his writings by critics of every persuasion" (Lewis xiv). Many academics and critics try to determine the exact nature of the apparitions delineated in this ambiguous story. They offer different interpretations, which are often mutually exclusive. Whether the apparitions are the projection of the governess or an objective existence is still disputed today. It has generated a range of earnest critical responses, from journalistic reviews to major theoretical essays.

The Turn of the Screw has been well received since its publication. Some early reviews regard it as an extraordinary work that studies the "magic of evil, of the subtle influence over human hearts and minds of the sin" (*New York Times* 149). Many reviews concentrate on the techniques James employs and the grotesque atmosphere he creates, but some other reviews also start to pay attention to the spiritual state of the governess, such as "A Masterpiece by Mr. Henry James" from *New York Tribute Illustrated Supplement* in 1898, "Psychic Phenomena" from *The Chautauquan* in 1899, and "Facts, or Delusions" from *Modern Studies* in 1907. However, it is still evident that most of James's contemporaries consider the story as a thrilling ghost story.

Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren point out, "With evident faith in the possibility of a conclusive answer, James's most early readers addressed the text in terms of a strict binarism: Are the ghosts real, or are they figments of the governess's

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